

Flu Activity Peaking Late in Delaware, Public Health Officials Say: “It’s Not too Late to Get your Flu Vaccine”

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is encouraging everyone who has not yet been vaccinated against the flu to do so as soon as possible. DPH is currently reporting 92 new lab-confirmed flu cases for the week ending Feb. 27, which is more than double the number of cases from the week before. The numbers, which officials say could grow even higher by week’s end, don’t include the cases identified at the Howard R. Young Correctional Institution (HRYCI).

At the beginning of February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported seeing influenza activity increasing across the country, and had received reports of severe respiratory illness among young- to middle-aged adults with the Influenza A H1N1pdm09 virus. Most of these patients were reportedly unvaccinated, according to the CDC. In the past, the H1N1pdm09 virus infection has caused severe illness in some children and young- and middle-aged adults.

The CDC is also urging clinicians to implement rapid antiviral treatment of very ill and high-risk suspect influenza patients without waiting for testing. Early antiviral treatment works best, but may be beneficial for hospitalized patients up to four to five days after symptoms begin. Early antiviral treatment can reduce influenza morbidity and mortality.

“It is important for everyone to understand that it is not too late to get your flu vaccine,” said Dr. Karyl Rattay, DPH director. “The age range of those being most affected by this particular influenza strain are the least likely to get

vaccinated and it is vital that they take steps to protect themselves from illness.”

Since October 2015, CDC has detected co-circulation of influenza A(H3N2), A(H1N1)pdm09, and influenza B viruses. However, H1N1pdm09 viruses have dominated since January. This year’s flu vaccine offers protection against all three of these strains of the virus. The CDC recently announced the vaccine is nearly 60 percent effective at preventing the flu.

As of Feb. 13, 2016, there were 100 total lab-confirmed cases of the flu in Delaware for the 2015 – 2016 flu season. That includes 56 in New Castle County, 24 in Kent County and 20 in Sussex County.

DPH urges all Delawareans 6 months of age and older who have not yet been vaccinated against the flu to get a vaccination as soon as possible. The flu is easy to transmit and you can get it from healthy – but unvaccinated – children and adults. The vaccine is readily available through medical providers, pharmacies, and some grocery stores as well as many State Service Centers. For a listing of State Service Centers providing vaccinations, visit dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/fluclinics.html.

Flu vaccination reduces the risk of getting sick from the flu or spreading the disease to others. It is especially important that the following groups get flu shots: Pregnant women and their household contacts; caregivers and household contacts of children younger than 6 months, since those children are too young to receive the vaccine; seniors; those with chronic conditions or compromised immune systems; and health care providers.

Delawareans are encouraged to prevent infection by taking simple everyday measures such as washing hands, using hand sanitizer, covering coughs and sneezes and staying at home when sick. These efforts help stop the spread of respiratory

illnesses including flu.

Flu symptoms come on suddenly, and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, and fatigue. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Providers can prescribe antiviral medicines to make illness milder, hasten recovery, and prevent serious complications, hospitalizations, and even death.

Beginning in October each year, DPH monitors the occurrence of influenza-like illness in hospitals, selected long-term care facilities and medical clinics to track flu trends in the state. During the 2014-2015 flu season, there were 28 flu-related deaths and 2,390 confirmed cases of influenza in Delaware, a significant increase in activity from the prior flu season.

For more information on influenza prevention, diagnosis and treatment, call the Division of Public Health at 888-282-8672 or visit flu.delaware.gov.

Department of Correction (DOC) officials have implemented a series of infection control measures to contain the spread of the flu at HRYCI. The DOC began offering voluntary flu vaccinations in the fall and will continue to make vaccinations available to offenders and staff. Concerned families and friends of residents at HRYCI should contact Chelsea D. Hicks at 302-379-4048.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit delawarerelay.com. Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the

quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.